

LOCATING ASIAN AMERICANS IN ADULT EDUCATION DISCOURSE

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As disparate as their countries of origin and their histories, Asian Americans share a common experience of discrimination, injustice and oppression with other minority groups. In spite of the notable gains and inroads made in bringing the voices of Native, African, Latino Americans and other minority groups of various perspectives and orientations to the center of adult education discourse, Asian Americans, more than a century after they came to work in railroads and sugarcane plantations have yet to find their 'space' in the field. There is a need to explore issues that relate to Asian Americans in the broader context of their participation in the mainstream socio-cultural and political processes and in the more specific context of participation in adult learning environments.

The "Model Minority" label used to describe the group has pitted them against others especially in the allocation of funds needed to support marginalized ethnic groups. The stereotypic label obscures the presence of Asian Americans who live on the fringes of society: single mothers and fathers, women recruited into prostitution, men and women working in sweatshops, Asians caught in the web of international drug and human trafficking. Asian Americans, who do not fit the label and are 'less successful' than their peers could find it difficult to gain access to social and government services.

Though the term is used in a positive light, it reinforces the dominant culture's standards of success. It also prevents the conduct of research and investigations that may be helpful in creating policies that address their needs. Does the "Model Minority" label mean that Asian Americans can be successful so long as they do not question the existing inequalities in the society? Against which and whose standards is success being measured? What strategies of adoption and integration did Asian Americans use to succeed in this society? What did they give up, in return? How has being 'successful' in the mainstream society positioned them in relation to other minority groups?

The strength of adult education lies in the field's accommodation of competing interests and voices. The challenge to practitioners is to expand the space further to bring seldom-heard voices to the center, one of them, the Asian American voice.

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